

Whew! Poor Frank. Didja just hear what the boss said to him? I don't know if he was exhausted from his long trip or what. But as soon as he got back, the boss lined the three of us up. First, there was Arthur—y'know, the one who started out with the five talents—then me with the two, and finally he got around to Frank with the one. You see, after all that time, the boss just wanted to see how things went while he'd been away. So, with Arthur and me everything got off to a great start—the boss couldn't have been more pleased. After hearing we'd doubled his assets, it was all he could do to contain himself. He slapped us on the back, and practically adopted us as his own. But then when he got to Frank—*oh Frank*.

Frank's always been a bit of an odd cat, if you ask me. And what he'd done just goes to show ya. Out of his pocket, Frank pulled out the original coin, as shiny and new as the day he'd gotten it. That didn't please the boss none when he saw it—he gripped his chest like he'd just been stabbed in the heart. Confused, the boss just stammered, “I-I-I haven't I taught you anything? You don't just go stuffing money under your mattress, son. No, you let it go to work for you. Any idiot knows, at the very least, you put it in the bank and let it accrue interest. Because of what you did, I actually lost money!” Then, without holding back on Frank, the boss really raised hell—“Gimme that talent, Frank. Here, Art, catch—you know what to do with it. Boys, let's show Frank the door.” I remember when Frank originally told us his plan to bury it way back at the beginning, we knew the boss would be steamed—but we had no idea. So, what happened?

Well, one thing the boss hates more than seeing an opportunity wasted, is getting his reputation sullied like that. I mean, did you hear what set this whole thing off? At first, the boss was being patient with Frank, giving him a chance to explain. But then Frank started calling him names. You might recall Frank said that he was a “hard man, reapin' where [he] did not sow and gatherin' where [he] scattered no seed.” When he said that, I just palmed my face and thought, “Oh Frank, now you've done it.” Frank might as well have called the boss “stubborn,” “rigid,” “unfair”—“cheap” even. On top of it all, he told the boss that he was scary, saying, “I was afraid” and that's why he went and hid his talent. Imagine somebody saying all that about you to your face—how would you take it?

Who knows how he coulda ever said that about the boss. After all, just consider what he'd done for us. First off, he took his own fortune—every penny to his name—and while he was away, he entrusted it to us, just some simple slaves. Would you do that? And secondly, consider just how much that fortune was—one talent is about the equivalent of twenty years work going by the typical paycheck. So, Arthur's five talents—that's about one hundred years' salary for the average Joe. That's about twice what most people earn in one lifetime. To me, it was two talents, about forty years' salary. And to Frank, twenty years'. Between the three of us, the boss gave us enough for somebody to live on for 160 years! How many of you would trust anyone—let alone a slave—with that kind of wealth?

And beyond just betting on three slaves with all his money, think of what he considers a good return on his investment. Most men of business would want to see their money pay off in spades, getting back many times over the little bit they put in. Imagine what Arthur could've made with five talents, had he known what he was doing! And if only I'd taken a few courses, I'm willin' to wager I could've really made a nice chunk of change investing those two talents. But the boss was happy enough that we'd only doubled his money. With his smarts, I know for sure the boss could've done much better than that. But he didn't care—that's the kinda guy that he is. Generous, trusting, kind—not at all the way Frank made him out to be.

As if that weren't enough to prove it, just think of how he rewarded us. I mean, we're slaves, underlings, nobodies. We don't deserve nothin'. We're just lucky we have three hots and a cot. But, even with as little as we made for him—just doubling his money—he still compliments us, “Well done,” he says. He even calls us “good and faithful servant[s].” Then, he sets us over the rest of his estate, saying, “You've been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.” And what's more, perhaps over-the-top, is he invites us to live like him—sharing his overstuffed wingback chair, feasting on gourmet delicacies, pretty much havin' our run of the place. That's what he means when he says, “Enter into the joy of your master.” Now, does that sound like a “hard man” to you? A guy like that, willing to take such a risk with us, why we had

nothing to lose. We could take his money and invest it, able to trust that even if we'd lost every cent, he'd be the type who'd just be proud of us for trying. That was something we knew we could bank on.

So, that's our story, how 'bout yours? I hear you've got a similar situation. You've got a master too: God. And He's entrusted you with a lot—more than Art, me, or Frank combined. Not only do you have all your needs met—food, shelter, clothing. You've got all the conveniences too—car, cell phone, microwave. You also have nice creature comforts, like central heating and air, indoor plumbing, electricity any time you need it—things that people for most of history had to live without. Then, you're also in a position to splurge every now and again. Maybe best of all, there's your friends, your family, your congregation, your co-workers, your neighbors—folks you get to enjoy life with. And before we forget, there are all those other things that are easy to take for granted—your health, your natural gifts, talents, and abilities. Have you ever considered just how much you've been entrusted with!

And who are you, that God would do that? You're just a creature, a mere mortal, and a fallible one at that! But that doesn't stop Him from sharing with you while He's away. So, how's that going anyway?

Are you like Frank, never quite able to see the goodness and generosity of God? Do you also see Him as a "hard man"? And because of that, are you afraid of losing what it is that you have? Do you keep it all to yourself, burying it deep inside, because you're worried it's all you'll ever get? With all that the Master's already entrusted you with, how could you think it could ever run out? That's silly—He'll always provide for you. Has He failed yet? After all, here you are today.

Or maybe you don't hold onto what you've got because you're afraid of saying good-bye to it. Maybe you're just afraid that the Master will turn out to be a "hard man" when He comes back. On the Last Day, when He comes again in judgment, are you scared of how you'll be judged for your stewardship? I've known people like that—good, well-meaning, Christian people—who get so caught up in *how* they manage what they've got that they become too paralyzed to ever really manage it. They're so worried they might not be putting it toward the right cause—that it might be wasted or should be saved up for somebody who could use it more—that they never end up actually giving anything away. The gifts go ungiven; the blessings go without being a blessing. It's so sad. That's what happened to Frank—don't let it happen to you.

No, let me fill in you on something about your Master. If He's anything like the boss, it doesn't matter how you play the game, the only thing that matters is that you play. It's fail proof, you can't lose—it's set up so that all you can do is win! To the one who's faithful with a little, more will be given. The only way you can lose, is if you refuse to play at all. So, take it from Frank, ironically you're taking a bigger risk if you don't take any risk at all.

All of this is the peculiar economics of God. Somehow when you lose you win, when you're falling behind you're up front, when you take a risk it's a sure thing. Just ask God Himself—He's no stranger to risks. Besides trusting us with His world, He also trusted us with His Son. He gave us Jesus Christ. And how did that work out? We nailed Him to a cross. God knew it was risky doing business with the likes of us, putting Himself in the hands of sinners, but He did anyway.

But before you go thinkin' what God did was foolish, understand this. By risking it all, putting it all on the line, losing all that He had—even His own Son—He more than doubled His investment. Not only did He get Jesus back on the third day, but He got back the world—you and me included! When St. John wrote Revelation, he was looking into heaven and here's what he saw: "A great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb". Lord knows, there wouldn't be such a party in heaven had He not risked His Son.

So, with a Master like that, please understand you have nothing to fear. And anyway, Jesus has already paid for any mistakes you might make, and more than made up for any shortfalls. Whenever He returns, you're guaranteed to hear "Well done, good and faithful servant."

And that brings me to one last thing. For Art and me, entering the joy of our master meant becoming a member of the household, and living it up in his mansion. For you, one day entering the joy of your Master will mean something similar.

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Matthew 25:14-27

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But, having such a good and gracious Master like that also means you don't have to wait. That joy is something you already have each and every day.